

May 1, 2006

To: GEC

From: James Richardson

Re: Oral Focus Board Annual Report

1. The Oral Focus Board met throughout the Fall and Spring semesters. All of the members actively participated and worked efficiently to accomplish our tasks on time. With great support from the Gen Ed staff, the Board came together as an effective self-managed work team. Chairing the Board has really required minimal effort. Some specifics on our work are given below.
2. Policies and Hallmarks: The O Hallmarks were not amended this year. The board did discuss policies for course designations as we considered the first proposals for this new status. Specifically, the board considered the meaning of "inherent" in the requirement that the course be inherently oral. The board agreed that inherent should mean that there really is no way to teach the course without oral communication activities. Subsequently, the GEC adopted a broader definition of inherent, meaning a course that has been taught with a given focus and has that focus in the course description. The O Board then adopted this broader definition of inherent to be consistent with the GEC. The O Board also concluded that, under this broader definition, a renewal of a course designation should require a syllabus from every instructor that has taught the course during the designated time.
2. Proposal review:
  - Spring 06 proposals: 50 reviewed: 46 Recommended; 4 Withdrawn
  - Summer 06 proposals: 7 reviewed: 7 Recommended
  - Fall 06 proposals: 55 proposals reviewed: 51 Recommended; 4 Withdrawn

For new proposals. Approximately 25% have required the Board to follow up with the faculty member for more information. For renewals, more than 50% required follow-up. All of these were either eventually recommended or withdrawn as indicated above. Some attention is needed on the renewal instructions or requirements. See item 6 below.

Seven proposals for course designations are included in the above numbers. Of these, 2 were withdrawn by the department, 2 were not recommended, and 3 were recommended. Of these three, 1 was approved and 2 were conditionally approved by the GEC.

3. Current status of offerings: The number of O Focus courses offered continued an upward trend with 92 in Fall '05 and 114 in Spring '06. We seem to be approaching an adequate number of courses for the campus as a whole with 2061

available seats in Spring '06 that were 77% full. But a number of majors, including some of the largest, are not yet offering enough Oral Focus courses to meet their majors' needs. See item 7 below.

4. Faculty Development: Oral Focus workshops for faculty were held in the Fall and Spring. The Fall workshop on November 8 covered presentations and argumentation with panelists from Nursing and Speech. The Spring workshop on April 12 covered training and evaluation of oral activities with panelists from Engineering, Religion, and Languages. Both workshops were well attended and seemed to be well received by the attendees.

At the workshops, questions from the attendees frequently go to general issues about O Focus courses and proposals. The Board discussed the potential for improving the website on several occasions. Board member Bill Sharkey offered to spend some time improving the site during Summer '06.

5. Assessment: The end-of-semester survey was distributed. The Board discussed the best way to remind faculty that survey results are part of the requirement for O renewals. Currently, faculty are reminded in the memo sent with the surveys. No change was recommended.
6. A continuing concern of the Board is that most proposals for renewals are inadequate and the Board must go back for more information. The problem is that the syllabus submitted rarely shows how all of the O hallmarks are met. The most frequent problem is with training, as syllabi would not usually be explicit in describing training. But other Hallmarks, like percent of the grade for oral assignments, are frequently unclear in the syllabus. The Board discussed ways to improve the instructions or requirements for renewal proposals. No changes were adopted, but the issue should probably be addressed early next semester before the next round of proposals.
7. Based on input from Tom Hilgers, the Board set out to contact some of the largest undergraduate majors who have not offered sufficient numbers of Oral Focus courses. Initial contacts were made with some departments. The Board should take up this task again in the Fall. Personal contact from Board members seems to get their attention.